CEDEFOP

European Centre
for the Development
of Vocational Training

MAINSTREAMING VET POLICIES ADDRESSING EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

From projects and local initiatives to national programmes and policies

In 2014, the rate of early leaving from education and training in the EU had dropped to just one percentage point above the Europe 2020 benchmark of less than 10%. This encouraging trend is partly owed to the numerous projects and initiatives across Europe over the last three decades which have supported young people at risk of dropping out of education. Yet many of these initiatives have neither aroused attention nor found a market beyond their local context, in spite of their success. What has prevented policy makers and practitioners in other places reaping their benefits? What does it take to transfer successful practices and make them work in different settings?

Following analysis of the causes and manifestations of early leaving from education and training, and of policies preventing and counteracting the phenomenon ([1]), Cedefop has been looking at the conditions for mainstreaming successful projects and initiatives into regional/national programmes and for policy learning from one country to another. In its study on *The role of VET in reducing early leaving from education and training* ([2]), it has analysed numerous initiatives and policies, which have proven efficient in mitigating or eliminating early leaving risk factors, and identified their common key features.

A persistent challenge: obtaining conclusive evaluations

Evaluations of the effectiveness of policies addressing early leaving from VET are scarce in Europe. When they are carried out they often convey only a partial understanding of whether and why a given policy worked and of the benefits it offered to individual learners.

Cedefop has mapped over 300 different initiatives conducted in 36 European countries ([3]). Evidence of success is available for only 44 of these. Some have not been evaluated but underpinned by monitoring data providing some clues as to the number of participants and, at best, their pathways.

Evaluations of the whole range of indicators showing the ultimate effect of a policy on retention and qualification attainment, which can serve to inform policy making, are more an exception than the rule. There is a need to promote an evaluation culture to build capacity enabling policy learning.

Cedefop video on the role of VET in combatting early leaving with learners' testimonials on how VET has played a role in their decision to continue their studies and find a job.
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/videos/role-vet-combatting-early-leaving

([1]) See Cedefop's previous briefing notes:
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9084 and
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9101

([2]) Cedefop 2016, forthcoming. More information at
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/early-leaving-education-and-training

([3]) All countries which have participated in ET 2020 since 2014.

Conditions for policy learning and mainstreaming measures tackling early leaving

Cedefop has identified five key conditions in measures and policies that have proved to be successful. The policy messages linked to each of these (highlighted in green below) were discussed with Member States representatives (⁴).

Leadership and commitment over time

A high level of commitment by policy makers is crucial to ensuring sustainability of good practices over time. All successful examples of mainstreaming analysed by Cedefop are characterised by a thorough evaluation of existing measures and prompt adoption of their innovative features, subsequent upscaling and financial and political support over time.

- The *Local action for youth* programme was launched by the Luxembourgish Ministry of Education in 1984 as a pilot project and extended to the whole country in 1988. Today, its large network of field offices provides comprehensive guidance, training and personal support to young people to help them enter the labour market.
- The vocational orientation programme (*Berufs-orientierungsprogramm*) in Germany started as a pilot project in 2008 and was mainstreamed following evaluation in 2010. Since then, the programme has reached 815 000 pupils and created partnerships with 3 275 schools. Today, the project is part of the *Educational chains* initiative which accompanies youngsters from school through vocational training to their first job).
- In France, the first second-chance school E2C opened in 1997, as part of an EU pilot project, in the City of Marseille. Other pioneer E2C schools soon followed (in 2000 in Mulhouse, in 2002 in Champagne-Ardenne and Seine-Saint Denis). Today, second-chance schools operate at 107 sites in 18 regions across France. The number of young people supported increased from 1 000 in 2003 to 15 000 in 2015.

One of the lessons learned is that it takes time for local innovative initiatives to be evaluated, upscaled and eventually turned into larger scale programmes or policies supporting young people at risk. Long-term support secures the commitment of staff working on the ground and allows them to develop their working methods as they gather experience.

> Integrate elements of successful practice into national strategies

> Secure government commitment to scale up results of experiments and pilots

> Make regional authorities accountable for delivering activities to address early leaving from education and training

Evidence on success factors

Availability of evidence about what works is key to any systematic approach to policy learning and transfer of practices. Evidence is crucial to informing policies, putting in place funding arrangements, and helping build the necessary capacities. Cedefop has identified some successful measures which relied on comprehensive monitoring and documentation of activities.

- In France, one of the challenges in the fight against early leaving was the number of measures coexisting locally with little or no connection between them. The solution was a new monitoring system of early leavers comprising regional platforms responsible for following and supporting young people who left general education or VET without a qualification. These platforms not only allow the authorities to coordinate measures regionally and make sure they complement each other; they also offer an opportunity to exchange experiences. The monitoring activities proved to play a pivotal role both in raising awareness for the problems linked to early leaving and in mobilising all actors.

The French monitoring system is not limited to VET but is a comprehensive system requiring inter-ministerial and interinstitutional collaboration and compatible mechanisms to collect data across the country. This broad basis allows capturing data on early leaving from VET as it enables policy makers and practitioners to track learners' trajectories and to understand which type of education they have dropped out of.

> Carry out evaluations to provide evidence of success. Carry out meta-evaluations of several good practices to identify shared key factors in view of mainstreaming

> Provide time for evaluations to ensure that they can capture results and not only outputs

> Reflect the voices of teachers and take their knowledge and experience into account in policy-level evaluations

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(⁴) http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/evaluating-impact-and-success-vet-policies-tackle-early-leaving-education

Change agents
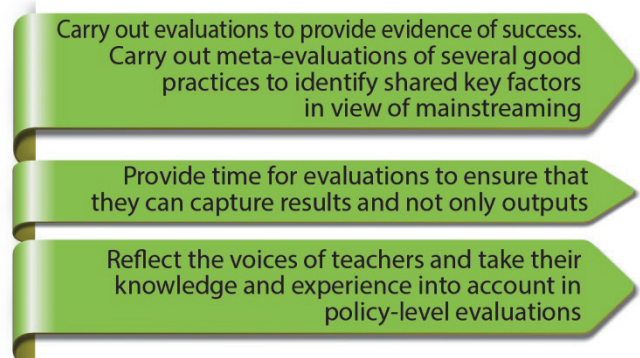
These are people who have the capacity to introduce change locally, whether in education and training providers, NGOs, guidance centres or other initiatives.

- The coaches in the Austrian apprenticeship coaching programme can be seen as change agents: they do not only train and guide young people but also provide support to companies who are struggling to retain any apprentices at risk of early leaving and actively engage in conflict resolution.
- The coordinators in the Danish Retention caravan, an initiative set up by the Ministry of Education to attract and retain ethnic minority youth in vocational training programmes, acted as change agents, both guiding and coaching the young people and supporting VET providers to use motivational pedagogies. The pivotal importance of these coordinators is illustrated by the fact that their function, established as part of the project which finished in 2012, has been continued since.

> Develop a network of experts who can support capacity building of schools based on good practice

> Provide training to education and training institutions and their leadership

> Get the support of headmasters, leaders of education and training centres, social partners and other actors concerned to support adoption of good practice

Communities of practice

Supporting peer learning and exchange of successful practices among professionals helps a group of actors to reach a common understanding of what works, a prerequisite for mainstreaming any project or measure.

- The project *Expairs* in the French-speaking community of Belgium from 2012 to 2014 helped 42 schools to focus their teaching on learners' needs and to design measures to motivate them. The schools were divided into three thematic clusters where best practices were shared, documented and transferred with the help of the project experts.
- QuABB counsellors in Hessen/Germany ([5]) are encouraged to exchange experiences and to work with a wide range of stakeholders, by participating in regular regional and state-wide meetings and workshops. The project particularly aids exchange between practitioners (guidance counsellors and

counselling teachers), who regularly meet at local and state level.

> Share knowledge about what works via publicly available, user-friendly databases Increase visibility of good practices, for example by making them visible through awards

> Promote peer-learning Promote sharing between organisations

> Promote study visits, info days, conferences, etc., such as an annual 'week for the prevention of early school leaving'

> Establish networks/associations for a 'community of practice'

Autonomy supported by guidelines and other tools

One of the challenges when transferring good practices is how to contextualise a successful activity. This is why policy makers have been giving increasing leeway to education and training providers and other stakeholders (such as social partners, employment and community services, NGOs) to develop their own approach, based on existing guidelines and methods and advice. In turn, they are expected to comply with specific reporting requirements ensuring that best practices can be captured and made available to others.

- The Irish Youthreach centres need to follow a quality framework developed specifically for this type of provision.
- The Estonian Pathfinder guidance centres follow the guidelines, indicators and annual goals set by the Ministry of Education. Within this overall framework, they enjoy a large degree of autonomy.
- In Denmark, the Youth Guidance centres were recently reformed with more emphasis on the quality assurance of their work. They work autonomously but are required to publish objectives, methods, planned activities and expected performance on their websites. To support them, the Ministry of Education has published a handbook helping them develop a quality assurance system.
- The French second-chance schools need to adopt a charter of fundamental principles governing their work following a relevant audit. This charter defines the key features of a second-chance school (support by local/regional authorities, objective of social inclusion, cooperation with companies, focus on skills). Compliance with the charter is necessary for the award of a quality label.

([5]) QuABB – *Qualifizierte Ausbildungsbegleitung in Betrieb und Berufsbildung* (Accompanying learners in companies and VET schools) - an initiative of the Ministry of economy, energy, transport and regional development of the German state Hessen.

Policy learning across countries

Transnational policy learning happens but there are challenges to overcome. The socioeconomic context is different from one country to another, and so are the roles of employers and employment services, of social partners and guidance and counselling services, of parents, teachers and learners. These differences may be crucial to the success or failure of a measure tackling early leaving.

Governance frameworks also vary. The existence of institutions offering second-chance provisions, the sharing of responsibilities between ministries, guidance provision and monitoring as well as the degree of autonomy of education and training providers will influence whether a certain policy or practice can be adopted in a given country.

● Both the production schools in German-speaking countries and the Matosinhos second-chance school in Portugal are inspired by the Danish factory schools. While the Danish factory schools are part of the regular education system, Germany and Austria have not integrated them as such. Nevertheless, the production schools have been operating successfully in both countries and are interlinked with other education options and pathways. The Matosinhos second-chance school in Portugal is an independent school run by an NGO in partnership with a local authority (city council of Matosinhos) and the ministry of education. The school is requested by the ministry to deliver official training programmes.

The way forward

Mainstreaming successful projects and initiatives into national policies and measures is the way to go if we want substantially to improve early leavers' perspectives

CEDEFOP'S FORTHCOMING ELECTRONIC TOOLKIT

Cedefop plans to develop a European toolkit to support the design and transfer of policies preventing early leaving from VET or addressing early leaving from education and training though VET. The toolkit will consist of a framework for identification of learners at risk of early leaving from VET and for monitoring and evaluating VET measures tackling the phenomenon. It will comprise different tools such as policy guidelines, recommendations, principles, catalogues of resources and examples of good practices from different European countries as well as checklists, questionnaires, and self-assessment tools.

and keep learners at risk of dropping out in the education and training systems.

Systematic impact evaluations conducive to potential upscaling and mainstreaming of measures need to:
● set targets against which performance can be evaluated;
● provide longitudinal data to capture change (most evaluations only give a static picture of results and outputs);
● provide comparisons with control groups or with similar measures.

This is all the more urgent as the labour market integration of thousands of young refugees and immigrants will require a large-scale implementation of guidance and labour market inclusion measures, some similar to those proposed to early leavers or learners at risk of early leaving. Cedefop will continue to inform policy debate with its analyses and support the design, implementation and evaluation of measures.

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